

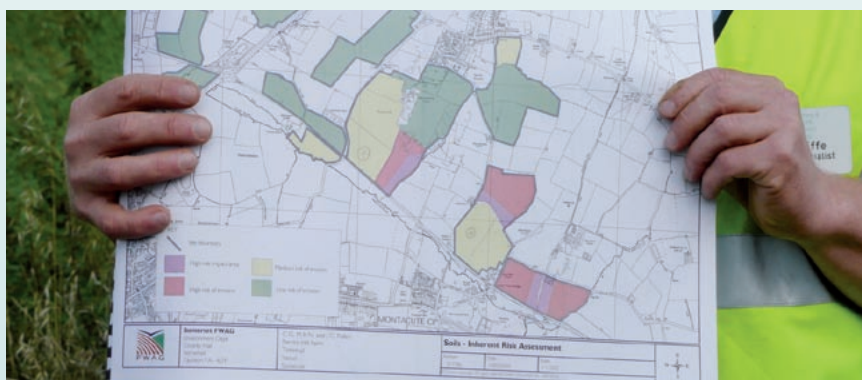
Advisory services

Background

Advisory services aim at helping farmers to improve the overall performance of their holding. They may also support the protection, maintenance and improvement of the soil resource. The Common Agricultural Policy makes it compulsory for Member States to set up a farm advisory system. The setting up and use of such services can be supported under the EU's Rural Development Policy; national or regional schemes may also encourage such initiatives.

Effect on soil degradation processes

Most advisory initiatives take a range of soil degradation processes into account, and have their focus on farming systems rather than individual farming practices.



Advisor helping to create a comprehensive soil degradation risk assessment map (Somerset, United Kingdom) (Source: Geertrui Louwagie)

Targeted information helps farmers to protect soil and water (Czech Republic)

In the Czech Republic, a sophisticated advisory programme is in place to support the implementation of the Nitrates Directive. This has involved a series of regional workshops, the distribution of leaflets, and the provision of information on appropriate management. The information can be accessed through the Land Parcel Information System (LPIS), a database in which areas and the demarcation of agricultural parcels are recorded. Developed in 2004, the Czech LPIS is innovative in the way it integrates environmental data with the standard LPIS. Registered users can access information on the requirements related to the Nitrates Directive (for example, restrictions concerning the use of fertilisers, and crop rotation requirements) which is precise, specific and targeted at individual parcels. The system is accessible via the internet and used by farmers, farm advisors and inspectors. The LPIS has been combined with detailed soil data and a digital terrain model, which forms the basis for a precise calculation of soil erosion. Specific anti-erosion measures have thus been designed, including anti-erosion balks, ditches, grass strips and retention polders. It has also been used to locate 100 000 hectares for conversion to grassland or the implementation of specific agronomic measures.

Source: SoCo case study in the Czech Republic

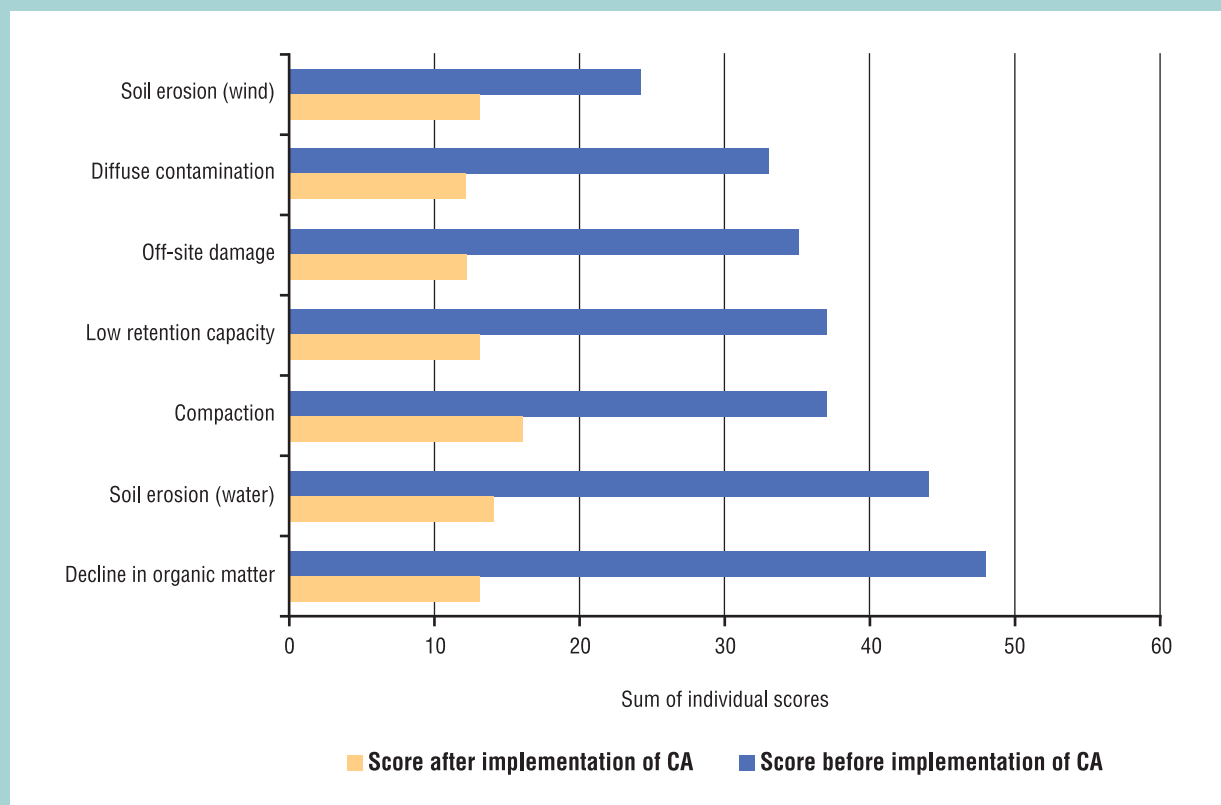
Addressing soil erosion in the Midi-Pyrénées region (France)

Current agricultural land use and farming practices in the Midi-Pyrénées show a high erosion risk. Technical advisors have a central role in dealing with agricultural development and taking this degradation process into account. For over 20 years, the Regional Chamber of Agriculture has been leading work groups on erosion control, and since 2000 conservation agriculture has become the core working focus. A regional work group looking into the most advanced forms of conservation agriculture has been established for the period 2007-2012. It is based on a partnership between the Chambers of Agriculture, technical institutes and farmers' associations, which constitute between them a network of showcase farms and a research programme. The objectives are:

- the development of simplified tillage techniques (reduced or no-tillage) adapted to the soil and climate conditions of southwestern France;
- assessment of the agronomic, economic and environmental benefits of these techniques;
- definition of the required conditions, in order to pass this information on to farmers and extension advisors.

Meanwhile, private companies are promoting simplified tillage techniques in the Midi-Pyrénées. These meet the need for farmers to increase their margins as well as better addressing soil degradation processes in their farm management. Farmers pay a fee of EUR 90 /ha for this locally adapted advice.

Perceived severity (sum of individual scores on a scale 0-5) of soil degradation before and after implementing conservation agriculture (CA) on 14 farms in the Midi-Pyrénées region (France)



Source: SoCo case study in France



Awareness-raising: an important step in soil protection (Somerset, United Kingdom) (Source: Ian Fenn)

Catchment-sensitive farming initiative (CSF) (England)

CSF (2006-2011) is a partnership initiative run by Defra (the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in England) and two governmental environmental organisations (the Environment Agency and Natural England). The government provides the funding, with GBP 25 million allocated in the initiative's first two years, including GBP 5 million for the Capital Grants Scheme. It aims to encourage early voluntary action by farmers to reduce diffuse water pollution and to improve soil and land management practices in 40 priority catchments, thereby contributing to a number of policy objectives, including the implementation of the Water Framework Directive. The emphasis is on information provision, advice and capacity building.

The measures have been successful in generating greater awareness among farmers of a range of diffuse pollution issues, and the soil management practices connected with these issues. By financing advisory staff on the ground, capacity to address soil management has increased, sharpening the focus of other measures including Environmental Stewardship, which is the main agri-environment measure in England, and the farm Capital Grants Scheme. Although the scheme has only been in operation for a short time, its take-off phase has been very successful. Under the scheme, over 14 000 farm-specific recommendations have been made, including a large number relating to appropriate soil management. The scheme has the potential to fill an important gap in the suite of policies available to tackle diffuse water pollution and soil pollution from agriculture, and to have considerable stakeholder support.

Source: SoCo case study in the United Kingdom

Further reading

<http://soco.jrc.ec.europa.eu>



This fact sheet is based on the findings of the 'Sustainable agriculture and soil conservation' (SoCo) project. It is part of a package of ten sheets organised around the three main topics of the project. The sheets cover the following topics:

- Introduction:
 - Fact sheet no. 1: Linking soil degradation processes, soil-friendly farming practices and soil-relevant policy measures;
- Soil degradation processes:
 - Fact sheet no. 2: Water erosion and compaction;
 - Fact sheet no. 3: Organic matter decline;
 - Fact sheet no. 4: Salinisation and sodification;
- Soil-friendly farming systems and practices:
 - Fact sheet no. 5: Conservation agriculture;
 - Fact sheet no. 6: Soil-friendly tillage practices;
 - Fact sheet no. 7: Soil-friendly farm infrastructure elements;
- Soil-relevant policies:
 - Fact sheet no. 8: Requirement to keep land in good agricultural and environmental condition (GAEC);
 - Fact sheet no. 9: Agri-environment measures;
 - Fact sheet no. 10: Advisory services.

All SoCo fact sheets and project reports can be downloaded at: <http://soco.jrc.ec.europa.eu>.

